

Erie County Human Relations Commission (ECHRC) – Commissioners and Reorganization Meeting

Minutes – January 26th 2021

Call to Order/Roll Call:

The Meeting was called to Order by Doug Smith via zoom at 6:03 PM.

Welcome to our new commissioner Kathleen DiVittorio.

Commission Members Present: Shawnta Pulliam-Brown, Mary Jo Campbell Christine Mitchell Kathleen DiVittorio Michael Martin, Jeff Pinski, John Steiner

Commission Members Not Present: Willy McAdory.

County Staff: Doug Smith

ECHRC Staff Present: Tony Logue, Wayne Harbison.

County Council Ellen Schauerman

City Council Kathy Schaaf

Advisory Board Diana Ames, Freda Tepfer

Remarks by 2020 Chair Shawnta Pulliam-Brown

Dear Colleagues,

It has been an honor, as well as a challenge, to serve two consecutive years as Chair of the Erie County Human Relations Commission. I was nominated just roughly three months after being appointed to the Commission, the end of 2018. Not knowing much, I was eager to learn as I go, and do my best to lead an organization that had been stagnant on cases, and proper oversight for over 10 years. I began to seek the voice of the people, and what I discovered was that most of the Commissioners did not know all their role, some in the community had lost faith in the mission of the E.C.H.R.C., and some even expressed, they did not even know the office existed.

To address and combat these concerns and issues during my 2-year tenure, I accomplished and/or implemented the following:

- In 2019 Coordinated the First Ordinance and Bylaws review Training, with Regional Director Lyle Woods and PHRC Attorney Carl Summerson, for all Commissioners, Advisory and Staff.

- In 2019 Coordinated and launched the First Annual “Know Your Rights Know the Process” Community event in collaboration with the P.H.R.C.

- In 2019 Requested and required staff to provide copies of monthly financial statements, which were not provided previously.

- In 2020 Brought to the attention of the Commission, County Council and staff, that an annual report (required in our Ordinance) is to be submitted to City and County Council and that one has never been submitted since the inception of the E.C.H.R.C. Pushed for and enforced the First Annual Report since the inception of the Erie County Human Relations Commission, as well as provided an outline to

Commissioners and staff to execute. After 6 months of opposition, the first annual report was submitted by Commissioners and staff in 2020 reflecting 2019.

- In 2020 Brought to the attention of the Commission, County Council, staff, and Advisory Board that an annual report from our Advisory Board was also required to be submitted in our Ordinance (to City and County Council) and that one had never been submitted since the inception of the E.C.H.R C. Required Annual Report from Advisory Board. TBA
- In 2020 suggested we come up with ways to resume business during the pandemic and provided my personal conference call information, to coordinate and resume meetings, until Council could provide a resource.
- In 2020 requested that the Attorney's position be posted publicly, in Erie Times News for equal opportunity employment. Request was honored.
- In 2020 Brought to the attention of Commission Staff and County Council a potential lack of Due process with the co-mingling of functions supported and provided a Georgia Pacific Case as a reference by the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission's Hearing Examiner Attorney. Requested and sought clarity from the County Solicitor. TBA.
- In 2020 Brought to the attention of County Council issues regarding staff. Follow up meeting has not been provided to date.
- In 2020 created and sent out letters requested by Commissioners to elected officials, requesting new appointments, due to lack of attendance. 2 new appointments are forthcoming in February from City Councilman Witherspoon and County Executive Dahlkemper
- In 2020 Coordinated training with P.H.R.C. Attorney and Hearing Examiner for Commissioners, Advisory Board, Staff , and Colleagues-Training included hearing procedures process, and general overview of Commission Ordinance.

Although there is still so much more to be done, I believe during my tenure with the support of my fellow Commissioners, I have provided a foundation of accountability, transparency, training and education that was long overdue, and will be a start to a better beginning. I pray that the E.C.H.R. will extinguish and eliminate discrimination to all protective class citizens in Erie County as it has been entrusted to do and wish the new Chair, Mr. John Steiner much success.

Yours Sincerely,

Shawnta' Pulliam Brown

Chair Erie County Human Relations Committee -2019/2020

Mr. Smith thanked Commissioner Pulliam-Brown for her dedication and service.

Commissioner Martin asked what the reorganization process is. Mr. Smith indicated the process being followed from Robert's rules for nominations from the floor and a vote on those nominations. Commissioner Martin then asked about term limits and it was determined that the terms are one year but no term limits and there is no nominating

committee it is nominations from the floor and all commissioners are empowered to vote. We reviewed this process for all commissioners.

Commissioner Campbell nominated Commissioner Pulliam Brown seconded by Commissioner Mitchell.

Commissioner Pinski nominated Commissioner Steiner seconded by Commissioner Martin.

Commissioner Campbell moved to close nominations seconded by Commissioner Mitchell.

Roll Call vote for Commissioner Pulliam-Brown as chair Commissioners Campbell, Mitchell, DiVittorio and Pulliam-Brown voted yes and with 4 yes votes out of 7 Commissioner Pulliam-Brown was elected chair and then started running the meeting.

Commissioner Steiner nominated Commissioner Campbell for Vice-Chair. Commissioner Martin seconded.

Commissioner Martin motioned to close nominations Commissioner Pinski seconded.

Commissioner Campbell was unanimously elected vice-chair.

Chair Shawnta Pulliam-Brown nominated Commissioner Mitchell for Secretary. Commissioner Campbell Seconded.

Commissioner Martin moved that the nominations be closed and Commissioner Pinski seconded.

Commissioner Martin asked if the meeting needed to be closed and a new meeting needed to be opened after reorganization. Mr. Smith and Mr. Harbison indicated it had always been run as one meeting so we continued as one meeting.

Approval of Commissioners Minutes / Notes:

Approved November minutes by Chair Pulliam-Brown and Campbell approved with one amendment on a second of motion being Mr. Martin not Mr. Harbison.

Public Comment Ms. Tepfer spoke on several issues. One the lack of quorum and meetings at the advisory council. She also requested the web site be made easier to understand and submit a complaint. She also reported that people were having trouble getting through to the office and get a call back. She found that the number on the website was incorrect and she felt intimidated by staff when trying to address this concern. Chair Pulliam-Brown recommended Ms Tepfer discuss the staffing issue with Mr. Smith and agrees that the form on the web site needed revamping. Chair Pulliam-Brown also recommended she contact our state commission and others with help revamping the advisory board. Commissioner Martin asked the date of the incident and Ms Tepfer indicated it was recent was within the last week. We agreed further details to be worked with Mr. Smith. Mr. Martin also asked how many advisory board meetings happened. They meet monthly but most have not had a quorum.

Commissioner DiVittorio questioned the vote and when Mr. Smith described the vote process and asked to revote.

Commissioner DiVittorio asked for a clarification on the previous vote and Mr. Smith described the vote process for Chair. Commissioner DiVittorio asked for a new vote for Chair based on having misunderstood the motion.

A discussion took place as to whether a re-vote could occur. Mr. Smith believed it could occur if a motion to reconsider was passed by the assembly. Commissioner Pulliam Brown asked for the source of Mr. Smith's re-vote information. Mr. Smith provided and read a law from the Robert Rules of Order. A motion to reconsider was moved by DiVittorio and Seconded by Commissioner Pinski. It passed 4-3 with Martin, Steiner, DiVittorio and Jeff Pinski voting yes and Pulliam-Brown, Campbell and Mitchell voting no. A new vote for the Chair of the Human Relations Commission took

place. Commissioner Pinski moved to nominate John Steiner, it was seconded by Commissioner Martin. It passed 4-3 with Martin, Steiner, DiVittorio and Jeff Pinski voting yes and Pulliam-Brown, Campbell and Mitchell voting no.

Director's Report:

Director Logue welcomed Commissioner DiVittorio.

Director Logue indicated we have 10 active cases. There are potentially 5 new cases coming. Director Logue indicates February 8th the courthouse will be reopening in a limited capacity. Directory Logue has the three attorneys requesting hearing dates for February and March.

Director Logue indicated that he would talk to Mr. Smith about Ms Tepfer's concerns if Mr. Smith wants to discuss it.

Commissioner Pulliam-Brown questioned if we were separating the functions per the co-mingling discussion. So Director Logue indicated he would be separating the 3 panel attorney duties pending any decision to keep the process moving. Mr. Smith asked Commissioner Pulliam-Brown if this addressed her concerns and Commissioner Pulliam-Brown still wants the written opinion for the future which Mr. Smith said is in process and on the way..

Chair Report / Commissioners Comment(s):

No report from Chair Steiner. Commissioner Pulliam-Brown wished to thank everyone for their attendance at the training with the state. Carl Summerson indicated he would return 2nd or 3rd quarter 2021 if requested.

Commissioner Pulliam-Brown also asked about the terms questioning why Commissioner Martin had a one year term but that was because he is filling an unexpired term. Also two new appointments coming in February from County Executive Director and City Council member Mel Witherspoon.

Old Business:

Mr. Steiner's reappointment from Carl Anderson and county council was completed January 19th.

New Business:

None.

Adjournment:

There was a motion to adjourn by commissioners Campbell and Mitchell and the meeting was adjourned at 7:22 p.m.